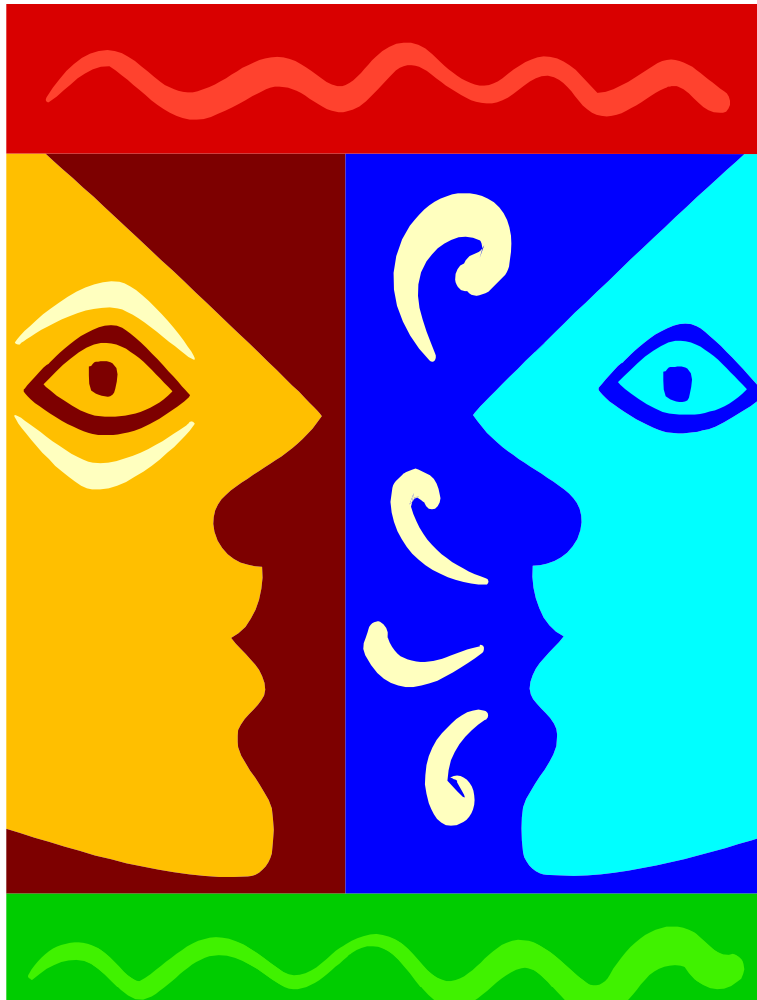


Louisville Women's Summit 2005 Report



Why a women's summit?

The Louisville Women's Summit 2005 was designed to **accelerate progress toward improving the quality of life for girls, women and their families** in Louisville Metro.

Many **organizations and agencies in Louisville** work tirelessly on behalf of **women and girls**. We must now seek new and innovative ways to work *together*. The needs are too great to go it alone:

- **More than 70 percent of the households in poverty in Louisville are headed by women**, according to the Benchmark 2000 report.
- **More than 40 percent of the babies born in Louisville are born to single mothers**, according to state statistics. And Louisville's teen birth rate exceeds the national average.
- **Nearly a fifth of girls in Louisville live in poverty**, and in some parts of the city, poverty rates are as high as 30 percent, according to the 2005 Girls Count in Louisville report. In addition, **nearly a fifth of girls in middle and high school miss at least 20 days of school a year**. These factors put girls at higher risk for teen pregnancy and poverty in adulthood.
- **The fastest growing segment of Louisville's population is over 65, and women account for nearly two thirds of it**. The average retired woman earns half the pension of a retired man, according to the U.S. Census. Yet a growing number of grandparents are responsible for raising their grandchildren in Louisville, and the majority of them are women.
- Kentucky was ranked **the third worst state for women and girls** in a 2004 report from the Women's Policy Research Institute.



All participants sat in a circle in order to convey equal value to all perspectives.

The hosts of the summit, **the Louisville Metro Office for Women and Women 4 Women**, are committed to stepping up their efforts to turn these statistics around. They believe the best way to begin is by tapping into the vibrant network of organizations and individuals in our community who support and empower girls, women and their families on a daily basis.

Thus the **aim of the summit** was to:

Open an ongoing channel of communication so that organizations and agencies serving women and girls can

- learn more about what others are doing in their areas of interest (girls, aging, health, etc.)
- learn about issues outside of their areas of interest

- gather more data about the needs of girls, women and families
- share visions and strategies

Encourage collaboration and cooperation among organizations and agencies in order to

- leverage limited resources
- build consensus about critical needs and how to address them
- accelerate progress toward improving the status of women and girls in Louisville

What kind of women's summit?

From the beginning, the goal was an event that would **engage participants in designing an action plan** to accelerate progress on behalf of girls, women and their families.

Ideas about how best to do that evolved along the way.

Originally, the Louisville Metro Office for Women and Women 4 Women **planned to build the summit around a topic that would be a high priority for agencies and organizations** which work on behalf of women and girls. They pulled together a diverse advisory council of 18 people to pick the topic and plan the meeting.

But after significant discussion, the advisory council decided it would be premature to build the summit around a particular topic. **Instead, the summit would focus on a foundational issue** — how organizations and agencies could work together more effectively to address the needs of girls, women and families. The summit, in fact, would become a laboratory for collaboration. This vision guided the rest of the process.

The council set **these guidelines for the summit:**

1. **It would include no more than 120 people in order to pilot an open-space technology format. An open-space format would give participants the greatest opportunity for grassroots agenda-setting.**

As part of the format, all participants, including speakers, would sit in a circle to convey that all perspectives had equal value. Speakers would address the group from their seats rather than from a podium, and only briefly. Participants would determine which subjects to talk about, and how long to participate in discussions.



(Left to right) Mayor Jerry Abramson, Ann L. Coffey, Women 4 Women, and Gabriela Alcalde, Louisville Metro Office for Women.

After organizers gained experience in managing an open-space format with a limited group, they would schedule a second summit which would be open to the public.

2. **Organizers would send invitations to specific agencies, organizations and individuals rather than issuing a general invitation.**

This was partly to ensure that people who had not been part of such conversations about women and girls in the past — such as school employees and young people — would be well-represented.

Invitations were sent to people and organizations recommended by the 18 advisory council members. The council members represented a range of demographics (age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) and interest areas. If invitees could not attend, they were asked to choose a replacement who was passionate about community-building or a promising community leader

3. **A central question would guide the summit: “What can we do to celebrate and inspire connections supporting girls, women and families in our community?”**

An earlier version of the question was, “How do we create community-based, sustainable connections and actionable networks to support girls, women and their families to strengthen the entire community?”

Ultimately, the council rewrote the question to be more positive and non-directive, which dovetailed with the intent of the summit itself. This was a transformational point for council members as they designed the summit.



Jeanette McDermott writes down her ideas in a participant-led session.

What happened at the summit?

One hundred nineteen women and men attended the summit on March 7 at Bellarmine University’s Frazier Hall. The day began with brief remarks by hosts, sponsors and special guests as participants sat in a large circle. Then, **participants were invited to propose particular issues they’d be willing to facilitate a discussion about.** From there, participants were free to join the discussion groups they were interested in.

In all, participants proposed 31 topics for discussion. **Groups of participants gathered around 15 of those topics** and produced summaries of their conversations.

The 15 summaries suggested **possible solutions to five main questions.** Here is a synthesis of those questions and possible solutions.

How could we create more connections among women and girls to support growth?

- **Organizations could sponsor mentoring programs**; employers could give employee-mentors an hour of comp time
- Women could **tell their personal stories to each other**, sharing stories of failure before success as a way of encouraging others
- We could **collaborate as organizations to apply for grants**, find ways to put aside competition
- Arts organizations could spend time together to network and plan projects together.

How could we eliminate racism and negative gender stereotyping?

- We could have more **community conversations about racism** (and more education among ourselves, others)
- We could **act against racism** through programs such as Every 1 Reads, and by advocacy such as support for voting rights for felons (disproportionately African-American)
- We could **work with pediatricians, hospitals, educators, parents, the media** on gender stereotyping

How could we leverage more resources to improve women's standard of living, education levels and access to childcare and health care?

- We could take an **intergenerational approach to self-sufficiency**; also, we could do more to encourage clients to define self-sufficiency for themselves. We could refer clients to other agencies or organizations that could better meet their needs.
- We could **educate women and men about options for earning money** beyond traditional jobs.
- We could work toward providing **more resources and information to women about health care**; access to health care is necessary for financial and other kinds of independence.
- We could **expand the child care conversation** to include flex time, maternity/paternity leave, part-time work, job sharing, employer support of breast-feeding for women employees. We could **make sure child care is on the agenda any time economic or business groups gather** and publicize local statistics on the economic impact of child care.



Pat Mathison, Family Life Center, St. Stephen Baptist Church, speaks to Summit attendees.

How could we do more to support women in both traditional and nontraditional roles, including as parents and business leaders?

- We could mentor young women, **being honest about responsibilities and commitment** (you can't do or have it all)
- We could **demystify being on a corporate board** (educate women about financial statements, etc.)
- We could try to **reach hard-to-reach parents** (Healthy Start is one model)
- We could ask local government/businesses to **advocate for employers to sponsor quality child care**
- We could **give parents more support for early childhood years** (networks, information)

How could we help girls develop into leaders while also addressing obstacles such as teen pregnancy?

- We could **encourage girls to delay sexual activity and do more to educate them** about sexuality and choices through mentoring relationships.
- We could do more to **seek out young girls for mentoring**, and offer more ways for girls to be in contact with strong women (because they won't come to us).
- Each woman could **bring a girl mentee to the summit** next year.
- We could start or continue mentor lunches in middle and high schools.
- We could offer **job shadowing**, more information on women's history, workshops on body image and how the media influences it.
- We could expand or build on the Louisville Girls Leadership Summit, other existing and effective programs.
- We could **work with parents on self-esteem for themselves, helping their daughters identify strengths**. We could work with parent networks such as the PTA and Success by 6.



Mari Mujica writes down her ideas on how to connect on issues affecting women and girls.

What resulted from the summit?

Two primary goals of the summit were to encourage collaboration and create or strengthen connections among participants. Here are a few examples of how participants realized these goals.

1 – We exchanged resources.

The Louisville Section of the National Council of Jewish Women operates the **Nearly New Shop**, which sells used clothing and other items and contributes all profits to charitable causes. The **shop had a surplus of suitcases, backpacks and tote bags**, and members had recently heard about another chapter that donated such items to children who were entering foster care and needed something in which to carry their belongings. The Louisville group was interested in exploring the idea, but wanted to learn first if there was a need in Louisville or if another group was already meeting it.

At the summit, the chapter's community services vice president, Madeline

Abramson, broached the idea with Lisa

Conrad of the **Home of the Innocents, a shelter for children who sometimes enter foster care**. Conrad said there was definitely a need — sometimes the children had to take their belongings in grocery bags. Conrad also told Abramson that the children sometimes didn't have the personal care items they needed (shampoo, brushes, etc.). Abramson took the information back to her chapter, which began planning a project to donate the luggage as well as the personal care items. "Networking through the summit showed, yes, this is a need, and we can help," Abramson said.



(Left to right) Kathleen Kurre, Howard Mason and Joanne Weis share ideas at the Summit.

2 – We encouraged collaboration.

Howard Mason of Metro United Way, one of the Summit's facilitators, visited Zimbabwe in **November 2004** to learn about community-based solutions to citizens' day-to-day struggles in the face of that nation's overwhelming poverty and health problems. Years ago, Zimbabweans had the highest standard of living in Africa; now they have the lowest life expectancy in the world because of HIV/AIDS, infant mortality and hunger.

So Mason was delighted, at the summit, to meet **Shingirirai Nyamwanza, a Bellarmine University graduate student from Zimbabwe who plans to return there** with a master's in nonprofit management. Nyamwanza will be doing some of the very work that Mason had been studying.

Mason immediately took steps to meet with Nyamwanza after the Summit to see how Metro United Way might help her get a richer experience in the U.S. and how the agency might tap her background and perspective for local projects. **She has now joined two Metro United Way committees**, on vital neighborhoods and civic involvement. "I wanted to find a place for Shingi to work with us and find some ways to support her. It seems like it's the same thing," Mason said.

3 – We made personal connections.

Mari Mujica and Deborah Barnes-Byers walked into the Summit about the same time and started talking while gathering their packets. Mujica, who recently moved to Louisville from southeastern Massachusetts, is an independent diversity consultant and native of Peru. Barnes-Byers is the outreach director for Girl Scouts of Kentuckiana. Barnes-Byers had been looking for someone to help with outreach to Hispanic girls; in the months after the Summit, Barnes-Byers hired Mujica on a contract basis to provide translation and other services to the Girl Scouts.

At the same time, **each woman also connected with others.** Mujica met Beth James Lovins of Blue Apple Players; since then they've had lunch to talk about professional and life issues for women in Louisville. Byers linked up with three Bellarmine University students who agreed to work with Girl Scouts as volunteers in the fall of 2005.

4 – We expanded opportunities.

Virginia Speed, director of leadership initiatives at Metro United Way talked at the Summit with Cathy Zion, publisher of Today's Woman; Zion was interested in **helping more women prepare to take seats on corporate boards.** Speed mentioned the issue to her United Way counterpart in Cincinnati as they were discussing their Women's Initiatives. In both cities, the Women's Initiatives include women who donate at least \$10,000 to the local United Way chapters — generally women of means who may also have backgrounds in the corporate world.

The two chapters began planning a fall workshop for Women's Initiative participants who would like to place themselves on for-profit boards; the session will be led by Meg Whitman, who is on the board of Procter & Gamble in Cincinnati and is the CEO of eBay Inc.

At the same time, Speed said, Louisville does not have as many corporate board opportunities as Cincinnati does, nor does it have many women in high-ranking CEO positions. But it does have **many committed women on non-profit boards, including many of the local Women's Initiative participants.** The whole discussion has reminded her of the importance of valuing service on non-profit boards as much or more as service on corporate boards, she said.

"The idea that women aren't doing enough when they're doing non-profit work is a cultural problem," Speed said. "For one thing, why do we call them non-profit? As Peter Block says, why don't we call them 'public benefits'? One woman's agenda should not be another woman's agenda. The absolute power of feminism is choice."

What lessons did organizers learn?

About a third of the 119 participants in the summit filled out evaluations. Nearly all of them said the **summit addressed important issues in the community** and gave them opportunities to network and collaborate.

They also said that the summit did a "good" or "excellent" job providing new perspectives on issues affecting women and girls. And the **vast majority of them liked the open-space technology** format. Overall, 58 percent rated the summit "excellent," 35 percent rated it "good" and 7 percent rated it "fair."

The opportunity to network was by far “the best thing” about the conference, according to participants who wrote comments.

Other “best things” included:

- “very powerful to be among 119 other women coming together for the same purpose”
- “thrilled by diverse representation — Canada, South America, Africa. Unbelievable.”
- “open forum to discuss these issues that allowed for all to share their experience”
- “honoring the feminine way of doing/being”

Most participants also said they liked the format and found the content of the summit useful to their work. Among their comments:

- “Busy people are used to being busy. The format used this effectively, whereas many conferences require busy people to sit still and listen — a style well beyond their threshold.”
- “I’m a student. To know that adults are interested in my education inspires me.”
- “I attended for work purposes and while I gained some great insight the connection to my personal life was the greatest.”
- “For me there seemed to be more time I wasn’t connecting, but (it was) good to sit and relax.”

When asked about the “worst things,” a few participants said that some of the sessions could have been shorter, better organized or more focused. Also, the temperature of the room was uncomfortable for some. One participant said she would have liked to see more teens involved. Another asked for a list of participants to continue more focused conversations after the summit.



Making new connections, Linda Chatmon and Adewale Troutman, Louisville Metro Health Department, both attended the Summit.

What are our next steps?

The Summit was a success in and of itself. It was a celebration and a chance to connect with each other. These connections will continue to make a difference in the lives of the women and men who participated in the Summit and many more who were touched by these new relationships.

In addition to the accomplishments of the day, participants made recommendations about next steps to support girls, women and families. Some of these are outlined in the previous section about what happened at the Summit. Others are included here as part of a brief action plan and update on the status of the recommendations.

1. **Organize a second women's summit or gathering** which will be open to the public. The summit will be responsive to women's needs (for child care, breastfeeding areas, physical accessibility, etc.)

Action steps: Form a planning team.

Status: The Office for Women and Women 4 Women will invite people to join a planning team by Spring 2006. Part of this step will be accomplished through organizing and having a Connect Convention in 2007 as part of the Women 4 Women–Connections4Her Initiative.



Virginia Speed, a Summit Advisory Council Member, and Tish Brookins, a coordinator at the Youth Services Center for JCPS, both attended this year's Summit.

2. **Create a way for Summit participants to stay connected** and expand their network.

Action steps: Create a listserv to share information

Status: The Office for Women launched a listserv in May 2005 and will continue to expand it. The listserv's membership has grown steadily; it now has over 140 members and regular Women's Calendar of Events information sent on a regular basis. To sign up for the Louisville Women's listserv, go to the Office for Women website at www.louisvilleky.gov/OFW.

3. **Ensure participation of women of diverse ages, cultures, backgrounds and experiences.**

Action steps: Identify and develop relationships with various groups to reach this broad audience through partnerships and collaborative efforts.

Status: The Office for Women has begun this process and is also developing ideas for future projects. Part of this effort is through the International Women's Day Coalition, of which the Office for Women is a member, which has brought a group of women together to celebrate women's contributions to this and all communities around the world on March 8th, 2006. The Connections4Her Initiative will also be targeting low-income women to improve connections among women of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

4. **Create a community bulletin board** (virtual and physical) of current and future projects, programs, resources and events.

Action steps: Research the possibility of creating women's park area(s) to provide a safe space for women to meet, express themselves, exercise, etc. The area would also include a "community wall" with information about projects, programs, resources and events.

Status: The concept will be researched and discussed with community leaders.

Special thanks

We owe a debt of gratitude to Norton's Women's Pavilion, sponsor of the Summit, and other Summit partners including Bellarmine University, Kathleen Kurre of Fusion Advisers and Howard Mason of United Way. We'd also like to thank our advisory council members:

Gabriela Alcalde

Annetta Arno

Deborah Barnes-Byers

Susan Barnett

Ann L. Coffey

Mary Alice Czerwonka

Sue H. Davis

Brenda Fitzpatrick

Shelley Hay

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Kathleen Kurre

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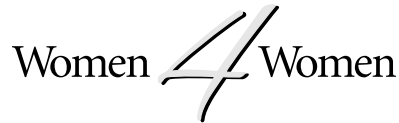
Cote Stepteau

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OUR BELIEF

We believe that a core strength of our society rests on the contributions of women.

OUR VISION

Our community will be one of the best places for girls, women and their families to live and work.

OUR MISSION

Women 4 Women is dedicated to improving the health and economic well-being of women and girls by increasing awareness, expanding resources and creating solutions to strengthen our community.



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The Louisville Metro Office for Women is located within the Louisville Metro Human Services Department and is part of the Advocacy and Public Policy Division. The Office uses advocacy and policy as vehicles to improve the status of all women in the community.

The **OVERARCHING PURPOSE** of the Office for Women is to serve as a *catalyst* for

- Raising awareness
- Creating and enhancing connections and collaboration
- Using evidence-based approaches

VISION

An interconnected community of champions working to improve the status of all women while making Louisville the ideal hometown and a safe and healthy place for all to live and grow.

MISSION

Improve the status of all women in Louisville Metro by developing and maintaining partnerships throughout the community and participating as a leader in women's issues.

Women  Women



Louisville Women's Summit 2005...

Bringing Us Together

Frazier Hall, Bellarmine University
March 7th, 2005